

ROUTE 31 BRIDGE

(Bridge No. 1013-158)

N.J. Route 31, crossing the disused main line of the Central
Railroad of New Jersey (C.R.R.N.J.) (New Jersey Transit's
Raritan Valley Line)

Hampton

Hunterdon County

New Jersey

HAER No. NJ-124

HAER
NJ
10-HAMTN,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

National Park Service

U.S. Custom House

200 Chestnut Street

Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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LOCATION:

N.J. Route 31, crossing the disused main line of the Central Railroad of New Jersey (C.R.R.N.J.) (New Jersey Transit's Raritan Valley Line), Hampton, Hunterdon County, New Jersey

USGS High Bridge, NJ Quadrangle
UTM Coordinates: 18.504140.4506300

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION:

1934

BUILDER:

New Jersey State Highway Department

PRESENT OWNER:

New Jersey Department of Transportation

PRESENT USE:

Highway bridge

SIGNIFICANCE:

The bridge was built with Route 31 (originally Highway 30) as part of the highway expansion program undertaken by the state during 1923-1942. It is a three-span example of the concrete-encased steel girder type. The bridge has been identified as a contributing element in the Central Railroad of New Jersey Main Line Corridor Historic District.

PROJECT INFORMATION:

This recordation project was undertaken pursuant to an agreement between the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) and the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office. Route 31 Bridge will be replaced during a highway improvements project.

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DESCRIPTION

Bridge No. 1013-158 carries Route 31 over the four-track rail line of the Central Railroad of New Jersey (C.R.R.N.J.) in the Borough of Hampton, New Jersey. Though the town center is located a short distance to the west, the bridge's surroundings are largely rural. In the vicinity of the bridge, however, Route 31, a fairly heavily traveled highway, is intermittently lined with business properties of the types commonly seen in areas of recent exurban residential development, such as service stations and quick-stop stores. The C.R.R.N.J. rail line is no longer in use and the embankment slopes above the railbed are thickly wooded.

Bridge No. 1013-158 is a three-span concrete-encased steel girder bridge constructed in 1934. Built on a skewed plan on a northwest-southeast alignment, the bridge incorporates a concrete-built substructure of abutments, wing walls and two piers, a superstructure of steel girders and floor beams encased in concrete, a concrete deck, and a balustrade consisting of concrete posts and heavy-gauge metal railing. The overall structure, including the abutments, is 180' long, with a deck that is 46' wide and a center span that is 97' 8" long. The bridge carries two lanes of traffic and a sidewalk on its southwest side. Each pier is formed with four T-beams rising from the base to support an upper mass that flares outward to form a cantilever to carry the superstructure. The elbows of the cantilever are decorated with cyma reversa or back ogee moldings. The superstructure in turn consists of four girders supporting twenty-two floor beams. The floor beams are spaced 6'-6" apart. The design of the balustrade is embellished with recessed panels for the posts and an open geometric pattern for the railing. In recent years an external steel guardrail has been placed along the southwest side of the bridge. At both the northwest and southeast ends of the bridge, plaques are fitted on the interior faces of the opposing end balustrade posts. The plaque on the southwest side is inscribed

STATE
NEW
JERSEY
1934

and the one on the northeast side reads

STATE
HIGHWAY
ROUTE 30

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Borough of Hampton

A village named Hampton had evolved by 1851, when the Central Railroad of New Jersey, the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad (D.L.&W.R.R.), and the newly chartered Warren Railroad concluded an agreement to build the Warren Railroad's line. The construction cost of the rail line, which was to extend westward from Hampton through Warren County to the Delaware River, was to be shared equally by the three companies. The C.R.R.N.J. was already operating its line through Hampton. Construction of the Warren Railroad line began in 1855. In the agreement of 1851 the D.L.&W. had been designated the new line's perpetual leaseholder, so that when the Warren Railroad's line commenced service in 1857 it was as a segment of the D.L.&W.'s line running from Binghamton, New York, to meet the C.R.R.N.J. line in Hampton. For a long period from 1857 onward, Hampton was generally referred to as Hampton Junction (Schmidt 1959:15; Snell 1881a:487).

Creation of the rail junction drew the attention of real estate speculators, who promoted Hampton as a place for business and residence. In 1865 the C.R.R.N.J. constructed machine and repair shops there, and these were soon joined by similar facilities for the D.L.&W. The building of the railroad shops led into a phase of rapid growth for Hampton, manifested partly in tenement apartment houses and stores catering to the railroad workers, who were mostly of Irish cultural heritage. Roman Catholic congregations built two churches in the town, in 1860 and 1867, respectively. As of 1881, Hampton was home to a school, a blacksmith's shop, a tailor's shop, a shoemaker's shop, and three cigar stores. In 1889, however, both railroads closed their shop facilities at Hampton, causing some economic dislocation and hardship for the town. Ultimately, Hampton's role as a local service center in an area of relatively prosperous agriculture ensured the small town's relative long-range viability during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Schmidt 1959:16; Snell 1881b:447, 453).

The Central Railroad of New Jersey (C.R.R.N.J.)

Bridge No. 1013-158 spans the now disused East-West main line of the Central Division of the Central Railroad of New Jersey (subsequently New Jersey Transit's Raritan Valley Line). The C.R.R.N.J. originated in the merger of two earlier railroads, viz., the Elizabeth and Somerville Railroad Company and the Somerville and Easton Railroad Company. The older of these two companies, the Elizabeth and Somerville, was chartered in 1831. It began service on its first two miles, connecting Elizabeth with Elizabethport, in 1836. The Elizabeth and Somerville failed to prosper, and in 1849 it was acquired by the Somerville and Easton, which had been chartered just two years earlier. The Somerville and Easton had opened its line between Somerville and Whitehouse in 1848, so that after the merger it could offer service between Whitehouse and Elizabeth. Renamed the Central Railroad Company of New Jersey, it completed its main line to

Phillipsburg on the New Jersey side of the Delaware River in 1852. In 1864 the C.R.R.N.J. built a timber trestle bridge crossing Newark Bay and connecting its Elizabeth terminus with Jersey City. In 1870 the line expanded westward, crossing the Delaware to Easton, Pennsylvania, and enabling a closer and more profitable access to the anthracite coal fields of that state. During the ensuing six years the company concentrated on the opening of numerous branch lines, an investment that ultimately proved very profitable but in the short run precipitated a decade-long corporate financial crisis (1876-1886) (New Jersey Historic Preservation Office n.d.:34-35).

The C.R.R.N.J. enjoyed a generally prosperous history until the 1930s and the onset of the near universal decline of American railroads. The line was particularly successful during the 1920s, when there was a great expansion of suburban communities in northeastern and east-central New Jersey. In 1967 the C.R.R.N.J. went into permanent bankruptcy and in 1976, the Consolidated Rail Corporation (Conrail) took over portions of the C.R.R.N.J. rail line network as well as the remnant of the company's freight operation. Service on the old main line in the vicinity of Hampton ceased in the late 1970s (Baer 1981:61; New Jersey Historic Preservation Office n.d.:34-35).

STATE HIGHWAY 30 AND BRIDGE NO. 1013-158

State Highway 30 was built between 1926 and 1935 as an element in a statewide accelerated highway construction program. The new roadway provided a modern multilane route running north-south between Buttzville to the north and Trenton to the south. Since the passing during 1909-1917 of a series of legislative enactments, New Jersey became one of the first states to take substantial steps toward realizing the program of the national "Good Roads" movement. The legislative campaign of 1909-1917 had culminated in the Edge Act, which established the State Highway Department. During the years 1923-1933, General Hugh L. Scott, former Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, served as Chief Highway Commissioner for the state. Under Scott's guidance, the State Highway Department undertook an enlargement of the highway network, and in 1927 the master plan of the State Highway System was expanded to encompass forty-two primary highway routes that would total some 1,900 miles upon completion. From 1923 to 1942 New Jersey spent nearly 500 million dollars on the Scott construction program. In the process, the state built the nation's first traffic circle, outside Camden, in 1925, and the first highway cloverleaf junction, at Woodbridge, in 1928 (Albion 1945:308, 310, 313; Federal Highway Administration and New Jersey Department of Transportation 1980:26;).

The construction of Highway 30 was a gradual process that continued from 1926 to 1935, and the building of Bridge No. 1013-158 represented an element in the closing phase of construction. During 1926-1932 the highway was built in nine sections, beginning from the southern terminus in Trenton. In most of these years, two adjoining sections were under construction concurrently. Section 8, which extended from the town of Clinton to the Musconetcong River and went through Hampton, was built during April-October 1931. The completion of the portion of Section 8 that was

to include Bridge No. 1013-158, however, consisting of a bypass around Hampton, was deferred. The Highway Department had not yet succeeded in bringing the C.R.R.N.J. to an agreement regarding the creation of a bridge over the rail line. In the meantime, travelers on Highway 30 continued to use an older road course through the center of Hampton. Agreement with the C.R.R.N.J. was reached in 1934 and construction of the bridge was carried out during November 1934-April 1935. Paving of the 980'-long segment of roadway including the bridge was done immediately upon completion of construction, enabling the bypass around Hampton to be opened to traffic on May 30, 1935. A Highway 30 bypass around Pennington, also delayed due to a similar situation regarding a crossing of the Reading Railroad line, was finished at around the same date. The completed Highway 30 combined extensive segments of new alignment with others consisting of improved roadway (New Jersey State Highway Department 1927-1935).

This highway has twice been redesignated, as Route 69 in 1953, and as Route 31 in 1973. As of 1998, it retains the Route 31 designation (Federal Highway Administration and New Jersey Department of Transportation 1980:26).

SOURCES OF INFORMATION/BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. Engineering Drawings

There are 13 engineering drawings dating from 1934 at the New Jersey Department of Transportation.

B. Historic Views

None were found at the New Jersey Department of Transportation or the New Jersey State Archives.

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